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WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3903

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The Honorable Richard Spencer
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Spencer:

I write to express my support for efforts to transfer a parcel of Navy surplus property known as the Melville Backyard in Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

For more than 15 years, the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (Commerce RI) and the Portsmouth Marine Partners, a partnership of shipbuilders, have been working to acquire the Melville Backyard. A Finding of Suitability to Transfer was issued, but unfortunately, the transfer process halted when it was discovered that firefighting foam containing poly- and perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) had been used on the property. As you may be aware, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a Lifetime Health Advisory for PFAS in 2016.

Initial soil samples have been taken at the site and the EPA and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) have recently submitted to the Navy their comments on the draft Phase 2 Remedial Investigation work plan for additional sampling to occur this spring and summer.

As the Ranking Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I am aware that installations across the country are confronting the challenge of PFAS cleanup and the potential health impacts on the surrounding communities. That is why the Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act requires the Department of Defense and the Centers for Disease Control to conduct a nationwide human health study to assess the human health effects of PFAS in sources of drinking water. I also understand that full remediation and cleanup efforts through the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liabilities Act (CERCLA) by the Navy or the other services will first require the EPA to determine the maximum contaminant level for PFAS. I intend to ask the EPA to make this determination promptly and based on rigorous scientific evidence.

I urge the Navy to proceed as expeditiously as possible, within all applicable rules and regulations, to complete the remainder of the sampling process and to transfer this parcel to Commerce RI. I appreciate your attention to this issue and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Jack Reed
United States Senator

cc: CAPT Ian Johnson, Commanding Officer, NAVSTA Newport